



Pollmann, K. (2017). Porphyry, Metaphor/Allegory, and the Christians. In I. Mannlein-Robert (Ed.), *Die Christen als Bedrohung?: Text, Kontext und Wirkung von Porphyrios' Contra Christianos* (pp. 85-110). Franz Steiner Verlag. <https://elibrary.steiner-verlag.de/book/99.105010/9783515115391>

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PORPHYRY, METAPHOR/ALLEGORY, AND THE CHRISTIANS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since classical antiquity intellectuals have been aware of the ability of language to convey content in a veiled or hidden way that requires a special effort of interpretation. A particularly striking visualisation of this fact is the image in fig. 1,¹ the Frontispiece of Petrarch's own manuscript of Vergil, which Petrarch commissioned from the celebrated painter Simone Martini. The result is a spectacular interpretation of Vergil in terms of fourteenth-century ideas of poetic creation.² Vergil sits in contemplation before writing his inspired words. Servius reveals him to the reader by his commentary, visualised in his action of drawing aside a curtain. A soldier or knight stands for the *Aeneid*, a farmer pruning trees for the *Georgics*, and a shepherd milking a sheep for the *Eclogues*.

The hexametrical couplets inscribed on each scroll (and a third verse in the lower margin) are identified as written by Petrarch himself:

*Itala praeclaros tellus alis alma poetas
Sed tibi Graecorum dedit hic attingere metas.*

Italy, benign land, you nurture famous poets,
But this man has enabled you to measure up to the standards of the Greek poets.

*Servius altiloqui retegens archana Maronis
Ut pateant ducibus pastoribus atque colonis.*

Servius is unveiling the secrets of eloquent Vergilius Maro,
So that they may be plain through³ military leaders, shepherds and farmers.

This latter couplet makes it clear that the poet hid his message in veiled language and that it is the task of the learned, professional commentator to uncover this hidden message. Thus there is need for someone to mediate between the outdated, obscure or seemingly nonsensical text and the perplexed reader. Such a concept rests on the assumptions – banal, but perhaps not always realised – that there are several layers of meaning to a text, that the deeper layers are worth exploring, and that there is a discoverable connection between the surface meaning and these deeper, hidden

1 See APPENDIX.

2 Jan M. Ziolkowski/Michael Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition. The First Fifteen Hundred Years*, New Haven/London 2008, 451–453 (translations above are partly adapted by me).

3 Ziolkowski/Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition* (supra n. 2) 452 translate “to”, which I find difficult to accept; it should be “in”, “through”, or “by means of”, referring to the metaphorical-allegorical dimension of all three Virgilian works which are here alluded to metonymically.

meaning(s). Taken in this sense, every text, even language in general, is assumed to be metaphorical.

Broadly defined, metaphor is a figure of transferral, of substitution, of incongruence, or, to put it bluntly, of evasion.⁴ It leaves it to the listener or reader to make the ultimate connection with the intended meaning and to find out what the precise aspects are that are hinted at through the metaphorical (“transferred”) expression. Notably, Demetrius, *On Style* (presumably 1st c. AD) lists metaphor and allegory under the various techniques of persuasion, as a very powerful figure of seduction or manipulation and thus belonging to the grand style:

78. “In the first place, we should use metaphors, for they more than anything else make statements attractive and impressive (...).

100. (...) In the phrase actually used the speaker has shrouded his words, as it were, in allegory (ἀλληγορία).⁵ Any darkly-hinting expression (ὑπονοούμενον) is more terror-striking, and its import is variously conjectured by different hearers. On the other hand, things that are clear and plain are apt to be despised, just like people when stripped of their garments.

101. Hence the mysteries are revealed in an allegorical form (ἐν ἀλληγορίαις) in order to inspire such shuddering and awe as are associated with darkness and night. Allegory also is not unlike darkness and night. (...)

222. These, then, are the main essentials of persuasiveness (πιθανόν); to which may be added that indicated by Theophrastus⁶ when he says that not all possible points should be punctiliously and tediously elaborated, but some should be left to the comprehension and inference of the hearer, who when he perceives what you have omitted becomes not only your hearer but your witness, and a rather friendly witness (μάρτυς ... εὐμενέστερος) too. For he thinks himself intelligent because you have afforded him the means of showing his intelligence. It seems like a slur on your hearer to tell him everything as though he were a simpleton”.⁷

The effects of such rhetorical strategies, which include metaphor and allegory, are manifold: they serve to ornament a statement, lending it emphasis and elevation, thus making the statement more agreeable, and/or filling the reader with shuddering and awe. Theophrastus is credited with a subtle insight in audience psychology by highlighting that the effort to resolve the enigma of an obscure expression draws listeners or readers into the argument. They are so proud that they have found out what the expression supposedly means that they almost subconsciously agree with

4 For further terminological clarifications see below under 2.

5 Demetrius uses the more recent term ἀλληγορία, instead of the older ὑπόνοια a derivative of which is used in the following sentence. The term ἀλληγορία is not attested before the first century BC, and can e.g. be found in Phld. *Rh.* I. 164, and several times in Cicero; cf. George R. Boys-Stones, Introduction, in: id. (ed.), *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions*, Oxford 2003, 1–5, especially 2 with n. 4.

6 I.e. Theophrastus, fr. 696. Fortenbaugh et al. (William Fortenbaugh, Theophrastus of Eresus. Sources for his Life, Writings, Thoughts & Influence. Commentary Volume 8, Sources on Rhetoric and Poetics, Leiden 2008, 310–316) points out that it is not entirely clear from which of Theophrastus’ works this quote is taken. It refers to audience psychology in connection with the omission of details or facts the listeners can supply for themselves, most likely in the context of discussing techniques of narration, and not necessarily diction and composition (315f.).

7 Translation, with slight modifications, from Doreen C. Innes, based on William Rhys Roberts, *Demetrius On Style*, Cambridge, Mass. 1995.

the speaker or author, and accept the statement as something they think they themselves have discovered, without further critical reflection. Thus, with this psychological trick the speaker or author manages to eliminate in their listeners or readers any detachment from content: hooked by the surface of the metaphor and by the ensuing discovery of the hidden kernel of meaning they are then oblivious of any further investigation of the actual implications of the discovered meaning itself. *Author and readers, speaker and listeners have become accomplices in their shared acceptance of the conveyed and discovered meaning of the text.*⁸ It is this latter aspect of participation between the reader and the discovered significance (“tenor”) of the text that this contribution intends to explore further in the following in order to establish the aspect of reader participation and reader psychology as fruitful categories that are surprisingly under-played in discussions of metaphor and allegory.⁹ By looking at the battle between emerging Christianity, as represented by one of its foremost intellectuals, Origen, and one of the most forceful defenders of the classical pagan tradition, Porphyry, the historical contingency and culturally determinable ownership of texts and their various forms of interpretation will emerge as fluid processes designed to create ‘thought collectives’ (*Denkkollektive*), group identities, and, ultimately, group behaviours. In order to achieve this goal, Porphyry, on the one hand, condemned Christian allegorizations of their authoritative text, the Bible, as well as some pagan allegorizations of the pagan canonical author, Homer, while at the same time promoting his own allegorization of Homer. Christians, on the other hand, in their early struggles to demarcate themselves from the surrounding pagan hegemony, condemned Christianized allegoresis of Homer as foretelling humanity’s salvation through Jesus Christ, while a century and a half later, this was done by Christians in the literary art form of the cento.

2. TERMINOLOGICAL CLARIFICATIONS

It is appropriate to begin with a few remarks about terminology. Aristotle was the first to offer a discussion of metaphor, although he does not deal with allegory.¹⁰ In his *Poetics* 21, 1457b7–9, he calls, among other things, the figure of thought that transfers the denotation of the genre to the species (ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους ἐπὶ εἶδος) or of the species to the genre, a form of ‘metaphor’. In this case, the expression ‘metaphor’ has to be understood as a *generic* term for rhetorical tropes in general. This is a terminological usage that is still echoed as late as the late 4th century

- 8 It is to a certain degree irrelevant whether or not the author really intended the meaning of the metaphor the reader discovered.
- 9 I prefer the term ‘participation’, or ‘complicity’, to ‘intimacy’, which is used e.g. in David E. Cooper, *Metaphor*, Oxford 1986, 153–178.
- 10 Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Fort Worth, Texas 1976, 46–53 and id., *The Rule of Metaphor. Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, London and Henley 1978, 13–27 is imprecise in various ways in his summaries of ancient theories of rhetoric, although still worth reading for its wider ambitions.

AD in the grammarian Diomedes, in his *Ars Grammatica* (Keil, GL 1. 456–7). In different, more specialised contexts of rhetorical theory, this specific trope was called synecdoche, and the term ‘metaphor’ was then used as exclusively denoting only one of the tropes, and this is also already found in Aristotle.¹¹ Most notably, in his *Rhetoric* 3. 4, 1406b20, Aristotle describes metaphor as *hardly differing from comparison*, using an example from the *Iliad* (rendering XXII. 164 not entirely precisely): Achilles attacks *like* a lion is a comparison; an attacking lion denoting Achilles is a metaphor.

But even this seemingly straightforward example is already fraught with problems. For what exactly turns Achilles into a lion? Is it the lion’s strength and bravery, its royal status among all animals, its tawny mane or its bloodthirstiness? The entire context of the *Iliad* and in particular some of the epithets used to describe Achilles make it highly likely that it is the first and the last of these qualities that are relevant here. In order to be able to savour the metaphor the reader has to know that a lion has such qualities, or – in this case perhaps less likely – the metaphor will only become clear later on from contextual hindsight. Moreover, what is the effect of describing Achilles’ martial activities in this manner? Here again it is an open interpretative playing field, and a lot depends on the reader’s own horizon of expectations, education, experience, or value-system. Animals are less rational than humans, so is there an instinct-like necessity to Achilles’ actions instead of conscious and responsible motivation, or an element of debased brutishness? Are the readers meant to see his actions as paradigmatic of general forces of nature or even as a kind of universal natural law? If one assumes that the lion is to be seen as a dangerous but royal animal, this of course carries with it an element of praise; if one sees the lion as a vicious predator, this carries with it an element of blame. Which is appropriate can only, with luck, be decided from the context. Otherwise it depends entirely on the reader. Things, even more than words, are prone to polysemy. Thus, in the Bible the lion can denote both Jesus Christ (the lion of Juda; *Apoc.* 5: 5), and Satan (who walks about *like* a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; 1 *Petr.* 5: 8). Ultimately, it is up to the readers which aspect of the metaphor they decide to activate in order to generate meaning and to find the similitude in question.¹²

Quintilian, in his *Institutio oratoria* VIII. 6, 8, adopts some of Aristotle’s ideas:¹³ “the metaphor is shorter than the simile, and differs from it in that the latter is compared to the thing we wish to express, and that the former is said instead of the

11 Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric*, Leiden 1998, §554 (p. 249) is wrong in claiming this only to be post-Aristotelian, whereas in §558 (p. 250f.) he refers correctly to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*.

12 Ricœur, *Rule* (supra n. 10) 27 concentrates only on the author: “To apprehend or perceive, to contemplate, to see similarity – such is metaphor’s genius-stroke, which marks the poet, naturally enough, but also the philosopher.”

13 Cicero, *De Oratore* III. 39. 157: *similitudinis est ad verbum unum contracta brevis, quod verbum in alieno loco tamquam in suo positum, si agnoscitur, delectat; si simile nihil habet, repudiatur* (“[a metaphor is] a short form of a simile contracted into one word; this word is located in a position not belonging to it as if it were its own, and if this is recognized, it gives pleasure: if it contains no similarity, then it is repudiated”) is similar to Quintilian, but deleted

thing itself” (*metaphora brevior est similitudo eoque distat, quod illa comparatur rei, quam volumus exprimere, haec pro ipsa re dicitur*). Thus, in *formal-rhetorical* terms metaphor is characterized as a figure of substitution; the metaphor replaces the thing it is meant to allude to. In *intellectual-semiotic* terms, metaphor is a figure of transferral; the original meaning of a thing or word is transferred into a different, seemingly less fitting or less usual context. Brevity is its virtuous characteristic, and it is a form of enigmatization. In order to make the figure of substitution work there has to be an analogy or some degree of similitude – the more remote the relationship between metaphor and substituted thing is, the darker the expression becomes, and the more pressure is put on the listener or reader to decipher the meaning. On the one hand, metaphor is thus polarized between aesthetic embellishment and semantic necessity, between clever enigmatization and far-fetched obscurity. On the other hand, it is precisely the discrepancy between the semantic surface of the metaphor and the surrounding context that makes metaphors attractive in a challenging way. Sometimes a metaphor itself occurs already in a contextualized way, as, for example, in “the fire of love”, thereby lessening the enigmatization in favour of aesthetics or simply customary expression. The potential semantic threat of the metaphor is thus integrated into a more familiar order of meanings.

This can also be observed in Porphyry, who in his *Quaestiones Homericae* regularly justifies metaphorical meaning in Homer by looking at the context. In particular he concentrates on a subsequent comparison which he sees as extending and thereby disambiguating the preceding metaphor or mitigating its boldness – thus, in a way, supporting the function of metaphor as an abbreviated comparison. The two most explicit, extant passages on this topic are Porphyry, *Quaestiones Homericae* 6 and 17 Sodano:

Porph. *Quaest. Hom.* I. 6, p. 22. 25–24. 6 Sodano: “This, too, is striking in Homer: after he has coined a rather bold (τολμηρότερον) metaphor, he adds a simile (παραβολή) which is consistent with it, confirming it, as though he considers its boldness well-taken. Saying, then [Hom. *Od.* XX. 13–15]: “and his heart ‘growled’ (ὕλάκτει) within him”, he adds, “and as a bitch, facing an unknown man, protects her tender pups and growls (ὕλαει), eager to fight.” (...) He has, moreover, made a still more intricate use (of this) for the Trojans [Hom. *Il.* III. 2–5] by beginning with a metaphor and adding not only a comparison consistent (οἰκείαν) with it but also a simile (παραβολή) consistent (ἀκόλουθον) with both. This is the metaphor: “The Trojans came on with a κλαγγή (‘scream’)”, the comparison (ὁμοίωσιν), “like birds”, and then the simile: “as when the clamouring (κλαγγή) of cranes goes heavenward”. This is about the only simile to which he did not give the point of correspondence (in his description of the action) since the comparison together with the metaphor provided the point of correspondence (ἀνταπόδοσιν) in advance.”¹⁴

from Cicero’s text as an interpolation, cf. Jakob Wisse/Michael Winterbottom/Elaine Fantham, Cicero, *De Oratore Libri III. A Commentary on Book III*, 96–230, Heidelberg 2008, 204f.

- 14 θαυμαστόν δὲ αὐτῷ κάκεινο· ἐκ μεταφορᾶς γάρ τι τολμηρότερον φηγεξάμενος οἰκείαν ἐπάγει παραβολήν. κρατύνων αὐτὴν ὡς εὐλογον ἔσχε τὴν τόλμαν. εἰπὼν οὖν “κράδιη δὲ οἱ ἔνδον ὕλάκτει”, ἐπάγει· “ὡς δὲ κύων ἀμαλῆσι περὶ σκυλάκεσσι βεβῶσα / ἄνδρ’ ἀγνοήσας ὕλαει μέμονέ τε μάχεσθαι”. καὶ αὖτις ἐπὶ τοῦ στρατοπέδου “τῶν δὲ στίχες εἶατο πυκναὶ / ἀσπίσι καὶ κορυθήσιν καὶ ἔγχεσι πεφρικυῖαι” εἰπὼν, ἐπήγαγεν “οἷη δὲ

Porph. *Quaest. Hom.* I. 17, p. 123. 23–124. 17 Sodano: “He used a bold metaphor (τολμήσας κατὰ μεταφοράν) referring to the two Aiantes [Hom. *Il.* IV. 274]: “cloud of infantry”, and on the grounds that it was well-chosen, he not only affirmed his daring with a simile, he also transposed words (φωνάζ) (i. e., between the narrative and the simile), expanding on what had been compared (by the metaphor) in what was being compared (in the simile): “(Agamemnon) came to the Aiantes, going through the throng of men, and (the Aiantes) were armed and a cloud of infantry followed.” Having first said, “cloud of infantry”, he develops his simile (παραβολή) from it [275–82]: “As when a goatherd sees from a lookout a cloud coming (ἐρχόμενον) across the sea, driven by the West wind, and to him being far off it seems blacker, like pitch, going (ἰόν) across the sea (...)”.¹⁵

Moreover, in the *Quaestiones Homericae* metaphor as a form of λέξις can be summoned as one of several devices¹⁶ to resolve seeming contradictions in Homeric poetry. For instance, when Homer once says that Crete is an island of 100 cites and once that it is an island of 90 cities, according to Porphyry this could among other considerations be resolved by understanding the number 100 as a metaphor for something “multitudinous” (πολύ; *Quaest. Hom. ad Il.* B 649 [8], p. 68 MacPhail). When Pandarus’ bow is once said to have been given to him by Apollo and once that he took it himself from the horn of a wild goat, then one solution could be to take ‘bow’ as ‘transferred’ (μεταφέρεσθαι) for meaning the art of archery in general (*Quaest. Hom. ad Il.* B 827 [3], p. 70 MacPhail), where μεταφέρεσθαι is used rather loosely, instead of the here more fitting technical term of metonymy. One could call this an *apologetic* use of the figure of thought of metaphor, to defend the text against criticism. As of old, in particular the assumption of allegory, which also belongs to λέξις, had been used to defend Homer against the charge of absurdity or inappropriateness in his stories about the gods (*Quaest. Hom.* Y 67–75 [1]–[7], p. 240 MacPhail).

For what follows, I will rely on the ancient distinction of metaphor and allegory. For instance, Quintilian defines allegory as a continued metaphor:¹⁷ *inst.*

Ζεφύριο ἐχεύατο πόντον ἐπὶ φρίξ / ὀρνυμένοιο νέον, μελάνει δέ τε πόντος ὑπ’ αὐτῆς”. ἐπὶ τε τῶν Τρώων ἔτι ποικιλώτερον κέχρηται· ἀρξάμενος γὰρ ἀπὸ μεταφορᾶς ὁμοιωσίν τε αὐτῇ τὴν ἀκόλουθον ἐπάγει καὶ ἐπ’ ἄμφοιν τὴν παραβολήν· “Τρώες μὲν κλαγγῇ” τοῦτο ἡ μεταφορά· τὸ δ’ “ὄρνιθες ὥς” ἡ ὁμοίωσις· εἶθ’ ἡ παραβολή· “ἤϊτε περ κλαγγῇ γεράνων πέλει οὐρανόθι πρό·” ἡ σχεδὸν μόνῃ τῶν παραβολῶν οὐκ ἀνταπέδωκεν, ὥς τῆς ὁμοιώσεως ἅμα καὶ μεταφορᾶς προεχουσὼν τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν (translations from Robin R. Schlunk, Porphyry. *The Homeric Questions*. A Bilingual Edition, New York et al. 1993).

15 ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν Αἰάντων “νέφος” εἶπε τολμήσας “πεζῶν” κατὰ μεταφοράν, καὶ ὥς εὐλογον τὴν τόλμαν τῇ παραβολῇ ἐπιστώσατο καὶ τὰς φωνὰς ἤμειψεν, ἐπιποιῶν τὸ παραβληθὲν τῷ παραβαλλομένῳ. “ἦλθε δ’ ἐπ’ Αἰάντεσσι κιῶν ἀνὰ οὐλαμὸν ἀνδρῶν / τῷ δὲ κορυσσέσθην, ἅμα δὲ νέφος εἶπετο πεζῶν”· προαναφωνήσας οὖν “νέφος πεζῶν” ἐξ αὐτοῦ πλάσσει παραβολήν· “ὥς δ’ ὅτ’ ἀπὸ σκοπιῆς ἴδε νέφος αἰπὸλος ἀνὴρ / ἐρχόμενον κατὰ πόντον ὑπὸ Ζεφύριοιο ἰωῆς / τῷ δὲ τ’ ἄνευθεν ἐόντι μελάντερον ἤτε πῖσσα / φαίνεται ἰὸν κατὰ πόντον.”

16 Others are ἔθος (‘custom’), καῖρός (‘occasion’), χρόνος (‘time’), and πρόσωπον (‘character’), see e.g. *Quaest. Hom. ad Il.* Y 223–5 in: John A. MacPhail, Porphyry’s ‘Homeric Questions on the Iliad’. Text, translation, commentary, Berlin 2011, 242.

17 Similar definitions can be found in Cic. *orat.* 27. 94; Cic. *de orat.* III. 166f.; *Rhet. Her.* IV. 34. 46; Quint. *inst.* VIII. 6. 14 and VIII. 6. 44.

IX. 2. 46: ἀλληγορίαν *facit continua μεταφορά* (“a continued metaphor generates an allegory”).¹⁸ Conversely, the undated Greek rhetorician Cocondrius, *On Tropes* (Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci* 3. 235) calls metaphors “single allegories” (ἀλληγορίαι μόναι). Seen from this perspective, with which modern theories do not necessarily agree,¹⁹ the relationship between metaphor and allegory is merely quantitative, with allegory being a metaphor that extends to an entire sentence or text.²⁰ Underlying the concept of allegory as *big* metaphor is the assumption that a metaphor can have the power to evoke allegory.²¹ Initially seen as an aesthetic mode of composition, it became soon a requirement for reception – i.e. a text was claimed to have a metaphorical, or more precisely, an allegorical meaning the reader had to identify. Here the necessary participation of the reader comes to the fore. For instance, enigmatization can be seen as a political device to express criticism in a veiled form, which only the initiated reader will be able to decipher. This, for instance, is demonstrated in Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* VIII. 6. 44 where Horace’s *Ode* 1. 14 is analysed as an allegory describing in cautiously veiled terms the instable situation of the ship of state in times of civil war. The Greek equivalent is of course Horace’s model Alkaios, fr. 326 Lobel-Page, which is discussed regularly in Greek grammatical-rhetorical treatises and mentioned e.g. in Heraclitus, *All.* 5. 5f. Quintilian, *inst.* VIII. 6. 47 also knows the term *permixta apertis allegoria* (“allegory interspersed with plain speaking”),²² where the transferred surface of the allegory is occasionally ‘perforated’ with the actual level of meaning that is intended.²³ As in the case of a contextualized metaphor, this preserves the challenging nature of allegory, but channels this challenge in a more directed way. In terms of threat and order one could then argue that metaphor is a threat, and that the context tries to tame that threat. Pure metaphor is more of a threat than a contextualized metaphor.

In the Metaphor Workshop at Chicago University in spring 2014 it was argued that allegory, because of its narrative quality, contains a message that was more indoctrinating and limiting as to the number of semantic shifts, than the ‘freer’ metaphor. If this argument is accepted, then one could also say that allegory tries to establish at least some order whereas metaphor poses radical threat. However I would prefer it to allow such freedom for ‘allegory’ as well, at least in the ancient context being dealt with here. This freedom is ‘tamed’ and led back to order by

18 It is noteworthy that Demetrius, *On Style* 80 defines an expanded metaphor as a simile.

19 Christel Meier, Überlegungen zum gegenwärtigen Stand der Allegorie-Forschung. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Mischformen, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 10, 1976, 1–69, 52f.

20 Lausberg, *Handbook* (supra n. 11) § 895.

21 Lausberg, *Handbook* (supra n. 11) § 563.

22 Karla Pollmann, Etymologie, Allegorese und epische Struktur. Zu den Toren der Träume bei Homer und Vergil, in: *Philologus* 137, 1993, 232–251, here: 248 n. 59.

23 Alternatively, the conclusion hints at the intended meaning, cf. e.g. the medieval poem by Der von Kürenberg, *Ich zôch mir einen valken mêre danne ein jâr* (Minnesangs Frühling 8. 33), where the concluding lines make it clear that the taming of the falcon really talks about a love relationship between a man and a woman ‘taming’ that man. This strategy of “ordering” the “threatening” obscurity of the text can be compared to the contextualized metaphor, as e.g. in the “fire of love”, see above p. 89.

the method of allegorical interpretation or *allegoresis*, i.e. the systematic decoding of the assumed hidden sense which then has to lead to a certain philosophical or edifying result. Thus, for our present purpose, it may be concluded that:

- a. Metaphor is a phrasal expression, which is used to create a connection between unrelated objects or actions by a sort of comparison. Allegory can be said to be a continuous metaphor, extending over a longer passage or narrative.
- b. While metaphors as a form of propositional language generally appear in literature (although there are also visual metaphors), allegories are found in literature, sculptures, painting and elsewhere.²⁴

The English literary critic Ivor Armstrong Richards, in his *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford 1936), defined the two parts of the metaphor as *vehiculum* and *tenor*, replacing the older dichotomy of image and meaning.²⁵ Richards' definition was rightly criticized as unhelpful and inconsistent by Max Black, whose denominations of *focus* as the metaphorical expression and *frame* as the literal sentence context in which that metaphorical expression occurs and whose discrepancy challenges the reader to reconcile the two, is more helpful.²⁶ Aristotle, *Rh.* 3. 2. 8, 1405a10f. described metaphors as having the qualities of 'perspicuity' (σφαρές), 'pleasure' (ἡδύ), and 'foreignness' (ξενικόν).²⁷ If metaphors are used to praise or embellish, they must be taken from a higher sphere, if they are meant to blame or censure, from a lower. So an important characteristic of metaphor is the mixing of different, more or less incongruent spheres. The decoding of their *interaction*, by the active participation of a reader is what I am interested in here; this was highlighted first and most helpfully by Ivor Armstrong Richards. The multiperspectivity of metaphor derives from the prowess or surplus of the focus, and from the indetermination of the readers' interaction with the two dimensions of focus and frame and the thinking space they open up. Ricœur's categories of deviation, borrowing, and substitution on the part of the author²⁸ require interaction between spheres and interaction between text and reader. *Thus, substitution and interaction theories of metaphor are complementary rather than mutually exclusive.*

- 24 Boys-Stones in his excellent collected volume (supra n. 5) does not seem to spend much time on this. In his introduction (3f.) he aligns metaphor with rhetoric, and allegory with philosophy, but this is not developed in more detail.
- 25 Later theorists used terms like *causa*, *ratio*, *fons*, ground or frame and *figura* or *scopos*, or focus. But neither are these expressions clearly attributable to various aspects of metaphor nor do they offer a comprehensive and clear theoretical description of all aspects of metaphor. This lack of clarity, let alone unanimity in defining the essential aspects of metaphor has recently again been emphasized by Monika Suchan, Mahnen und Regieren. Die Metapher des Hirten im früheren Mittelalter, Berlin 2015, 2–10.
- 26 Max Black, *Models and Metaphors*. Studies in Language and Philosophy, Ithaca, New York 1962, 28 and his careful and critical discussion 47 n. 23 of Richards' terminology.
- 27 This last term, as well as Arist. *Po.* 21. 7, 1457b7 ἀλλότριος ("alien, belonging to something else"), highlights the etymology of *allegoria* itself, which is "talking other"; cf. Ricœur, *Rule* (supra n. 10) 18–20.
- 28 Ricœur, *Rule* (supra n. 10) 20.

The focus has to be recognized or understood by the readers, which implies that their educational and cultural background is of crucial significance. For instance, if one does not know what a ‘bushel’ is one does not understand the metaphorical proverb from the Bible, in *Mt. 5: 15* “... neither do people light a candle and put it under a bushel”.²⁹ Secondly, the recognition of the interaction between focus and frame of the metaphor depends heavily on a presumed “analogy of levels of existence” (*analogia entis*) in order to be able to function.³⁰ The risk here is trivialisation or manipulation as the focus claims to ‘transport’ an aspect of the metaphorical expression that is universally known and acknowledged, thereby evoking and reconfirming clichés and stereotypes that are presupposed to be hard-wired into our culture. For instance, it is highly unlikely, although not impossible, that a lion will be associated with weakness and cowardice. If the latter were to happen, initially perhaps via a more extended simile, we would have the birth of a new, bold metaphor, deemed to be innovative or, conversely, countercultural, ridiculous, or too challenging. Thus, creating and decoding metaphors is a two-way process. It takes considerable energy to create a new metaphor, as, for instance, in the emergence of the concept of an ‘eternal Jerusalem’ as a political emblem for an ultimately victorious community with divine legitimization in contrast to an ‘eternal Rome’, an imperial power which will in the end be overcome – a concept emerging in the Jewish tradition only after contact with the Romans as conquerors.³¹ Conversely, a metaphorical expression will of course colour the reader’s or listener’s perception of the frame and, by extension, of reality. Thus, metaphorical expression is not as free as one might like to assume. Already Aristotle pointed to the sociological conditions of adorned language, including the usage of metaphors: as it intends to make an impact and elevate speech, it is therefore inappropriate to be used by slaves and all too young persons (*Rh. 3. 2. 3, 1404b18f.*).³²

A final, very important aspect is the agent or institution that decides whether a word or by extension a text has a metaphorical quality or not. As the author will often not declare his or her metaphorical strategy, it is up to the reader to join in ‘complicity’ to search for hidden messages. Here Homer was a striking case in point. As especially Heraclitus (second-century AD) in his *Homerika Problemata* makes clear, many of Homer’s statements would have to be regarded as offensive and vulgar, especially those about the nature of the gods, if they were not taken allegorically, i. e. as shrouding a deeper and entirely acceptable truth that is not immediately obvious. Indeed, in order to be able to have access to these deeper truths the readers are first required to purify their souls (3. 2). This is a fanfare call to the readers’ active participation emphasizing that such participation is only possible af-

29 Other helpful examples e.g. in Cooper, Metaphor (supra n. 9) 153; 155.

30 Lausberg, Handbook (supra n. 11) § 562, p. 255.

31 Karla Pollmann, The Emblematic City: Images of Rome before AD 410, in: Henriette Harich-Schwarzbauer/Karla Pollmann (Hrsgg.), *Der Fall Roms und seine Auferstehungen*, Berlin 2013, 11–36, especially 28–30.

32 Cooper, Metaphor (supra n. 9) 153 is slightly imprecise in his discussion of this remark by Aristotle.

ter certain pre-conditions are fulfilled, in the same way, perhaps, as having access to an exclusive club is based on certain preconditions. This kind of interpretative approach presupposes that one can turn something that appears ugly on its surface into something beautiful when looked at in secret contemplation. This has its ontological justification in the divine universal order that makes all things hang together in a meaningful way, giving each thing its well-appointed place. This allows even for the extreme assumption that what the poet thought may be expressed in imagery of virtually contrary import, as, for instance, the recognition that in Homer imagery of agriculture can denote war battle (5. 16). Heraclitus sees his allegorical interpretations as a defence of Homer's poetry (6. 1.), especially against the criticisms expressed by Plato and Epicurus. He claims allegorical interpretation, or allegoresis, to be an elitist process that is only accessible to a few (e.g. 3. 78).

3. ORIGEN AND PORPHYRY: THE STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY IN INTERPRETATION

3.1. Origen: Allegory and Cognitive Therapy

Naturally Christianity, following in the footsteps of Hellenized Judaism, had ample reason to exploit the rich usefulness and diverse potential of metaphor and allegory as innovative, apologetic, exclusive and universal. Christianity wanted to deliver a religious message that claimed to be universal and transcendent. Christianity was politically precarious and had, especially initially, to be cautious, and could use the visual metaphor of the fish as a secret mode of identification. Finally, the complex, partly very old and therefore obscure texts of what came to be accepted as the Christian Bible lent themselves to the same 'methods of defence' as their pagan equivalent, Homer.

Origen of Alexandria (died around 254) was the titan who on a large scale opened up the immense possibilities of metaphor and allegory intended to make Christian texts acceptable to an educated pagan elite. Origen was *the* intellectual Christian of the day and the major driving force that turned Christianity into a religion with an intellectual-scientific basis, enabling culturally accepted approaches to a new message. According to Jerome's estimate he had written nearly 2000 items³³ on Christian issues; of these works only a fraction has come down to us but even this fraction is very impressive in its size. Origen produced exegetical works on practically all books of the Bible, laid with his *Hexapla* the textual-critical foundations for a scholarly and methodical approach to the Old Testament, and is considered the founder of the systematic allegorical interpretation of the Bible. Origen wrote in his *On First Principles* Book IV about this approach in a theoretical fashion, combining the ontological hierarchy of reality with various levels of meaning contained in the

33 Hier. *adv. Rufin.* II. 22, based on the list of Origen's works Eusebius had inserted in Book III of his now perished *Life of Pamphilus*. Epiphanius, *haer.* 64. 63, speaks of 6000 book roles or chapters.

biblical texts. Origen's aim as an exegete was throughout to highlight the practical implications of the biblical message and to reconcile pagan philosophical ontology and scientific method with the Judaeo-Christian core texts and message. In this way, Origen is extraordinarily innovative in bringing about a paradigm shift. Metaphor, and by extension allegory, were understood before him as concepts of propositional language and rhetoric. Origen, however, adds to this language-based conceptualisation of metaphor and allegory a philosophical-theological framework that fixes their ultimate purpose and content.

The ultimate test case in this respect was the *Song of Songs*. Origen considered this to be a central text of the Old Testament (or the Hebrew Bible) as it embodied the ultimate in allegorical depth in combination with practical significance for every Christian life by allegorically dealing with the final goal of each Christian life, the union with God and his love (e.g. *Cant.* I. 1). Origen can be considered the founder of the genuinely Christian allegorical interpretation of the *Song of Songs* which became immensely influential in the Middle Ages³⁴ and remained so until the Baroque era. Taken at face value, the erotic imagery of the *Song of Songs* stands in provocative contrast to the divine purpose of the Bible. This makes this text a particular challenge, both exegetically and pastorally. Origen wrote not only a *Commentary* in ten books on this text (240–242 AD), but also a sequence of *Homilies* (240–244 AD).³⁵ Both these different types of text are lost in their Greek original, but are partly extant in Latin translations, covering *Song of Songs* 1:1 to 2:15 and to 2:14 respectively. Their comparison will help us to understand Origen's intentions at a more differentiated level. In general, his *Homilies* will have had a more heterogeneous audience of various educational levels, whereas his *Commentary* was directed at the educated elite. Regardless of this distinction it is to be recognized that Origen did not necessarily identify a high level of education with a high level of morality, let alone of spiritual perfection. Although he would agree with his pagan predecessors that some allegorical meanings are only accessible to the spiritually advanced, he would not necessarily identify this group with the educated elite.

Origen (Or. *Cant.* prol. p. 61 Baehrens; Or. *Cant.* 1, p. 89. 10 Baehrens: *spiritualis intelligentia*, “spiritual understanding”; cf. also e.g. Aug. *gen. ad litt.* 8. 1. 2) presupposes as a given that the *Song of Songs*, in contrast to other biblical texts, was written exclusively with an allegorical meaning in mind, in the sense that its literal basis does not report an actual historical event. It is nevertheless possible for Origen to include historical, textual-critical or grammatical explanations in order

34 See the still useful book by Friedrich Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien. Grundzüge einer Geschichte der Hoheliedauslegung des Abendlandes bis um 1200*, Wiesbaden 1958, and also, more recently, E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*, Philadelphia 2011.

35 Dating after Anders-Christian Jacobsen, *Christ – the Teacher of Salvation. A Study of Origen's Christology and Soteriology*, Münster 2015, 37, 39, and 41. The critical editions are by Wilhelm A. Baehrens, *Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller. Origenes VIII*, Leipzig 1925, 26–60 (two *Homilies* in the Latin translation by Jerome), and 61–241 (*Commentary*, in the paraphrasing Latin translation by Rufinus).

to refute Jewish, pagan and heretical positions. But his main focus is the allegorical interpretation of this text for his Christian target group. Origen is the first to identify explicitly the individual agents of the *Song of Songs* which were then taken over in the biblical texts both of the *Septuagint* and the *Vetus Latina*.³⁶ By way of substitution, the four agents of the *Song of Songs* are in Origen identified as follows:

the Bridegroom as Christ (in relation to the Christian church),³⁷ or as the divine Logos (in relation to the individual soul),³⁸

the Bride as the Christian church,³⁹ and/or as the individual Christian soul,⁴⁰

the Bridegroom's companions as the angels and perfected faithful human souls,⁴¹

and the Bridesmaids as the unperfected faithful souls.⁴²

In his *Homilies on the Song of Songs* Origen makes it clear at the very beginning that this was a text one could only approach after having already had some experience with other texts and teachings of the Bible. This he expresses allegorically: the *Song of Songs* cannot be 'sung' by a beginner as it contains divine mysteries that can only be understood by those who have first "sung many other songs of the Bible" (Or. *hom. in Cant.* I. 1).⁴³ But obviously Origen considers his audience at least in principle able to do this. Jerome in the prologue to his translation of Origen's *Homilies* stated that there Origen had taught the *Song of Songs* even to little children (p. 62 Rousseau: *hos duos tractatus, quos in morem cotidiani eloquii parvulis adhuc lactantibusque composuit*, "these two treatises which he composed in the manner of everyday speech for little children who are still being breast-fed").

But in his *Homilies* Origen identifies the Bride predominantly with the church and urged his listeners to stay within the confines of the church when approaching this text. Even where he refers to the individual souls of his listeners as desiring Christ as their bridegroom, his *communal-cum-ecclesiological* focus prevails throughout with the institution of the church as the controlling and ordering *community*. This focus is necessitated by the fact that he considers his listeners generally still in need of communal support. Allegorically they belong rather to the Bridesmaids than to the companions of the Bridegroom, a pleasing state as well, albeit on a lower level of advancement and understanding. For instance, when Origen turns to *Song of Songs* 1: 2a where the Bride asks the Bridegroom to come and kiss her: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth," he explains this ecclesiologically as the church asking Christ to come and kiss her so that she has not to content herself

36 Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien* (supra n. 34) 19f.

37 See Or. *hom. in Cant.* I. 1.

38 E.g. Or. *Cant.* prol. p. 61. 7 Baehrens: *sermo Dei*.

39 See Or. *hom. in Cant.* I. 1.

40 E.g. Or. *Cant.* prol. p. 61. 8f. Baehrens: *sive anima . . . sive ecclesia*; ib., 10 *animam vel ecclesiam*.

41 See Or. *hom. in Cant.* I. 1.

42 Ibid.

43 Cf. Jacobsen, *Christ* (supra n. 35) 216; the following owes much to Jacobsen, *Christ* 154–161 and 216–223.

anymore with the kisses of middle men such as the OT prophets. When Christ finally comes, the Bride says: “Your breasts⁴⁴ are better than wine, the smell of your perfume is better than all flowers”. Origen uses this erotic, cross-gendered scene bluntly to confront the interpretative attitude of his audience: they have to purify their sinful souls⁴⁵ so that they do not think of carnal but of spiritual love when they hear these words. Once they have done this, they are able to grasp the divine and true meaning of the entire Song of Songs, cutting through its erotic imagery throughout the entire text. The readers’ education alone is not sufficient, but requires concomitant ethical adjustments; moral and hermeneutical dimensions go hand in hand. This is not an easy process, not even for himself, as Origen admits to his audience later (Or. *hom. in Cant.* I. 7): moral and hermeneutical perfection and ultimate knowledge are unstable; the Logos can slip away even once one has got hold of him, and the search has to be resumed and all this in a repeated struggle.

In his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, which is directed at the educated elite, Origen is more detailed in his allegorical interpretation, or *allegoresis*, of this same verse 1: 2a. As already mentioned, and in contrast to his *Homilies*, here the Bride stands metaphorically for two things: first, as in the *Homilies*, typologically⁴⁶ for the church as the collective of all those who believe in Christ and who as a collective and in a historical process have to return to their Bridegroom, i.e. Christ. Second, and new in connection with this verse, in a parallel spiritual or tropological interpretation the Bride is also a metaphor for the individual human soul that seeks to return to God, i.e. in an individualised, personal historical process. Thus, verse 1: 2a “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” is spoken again by the church awaiting Christ. Here Origen expounds in much new and intellectually more demanding detail that we do not find in the *Homilies*, that this implies that the church existed already *before* Christ, in the times of the Old Covenant when the Bride was told by the prophets that her bridegroom would come one day. Later Origen will explain the kisses (Or. *Cant.* I. 1. 9–15) as the *individual’s* mystical wisdom and knowledge of the Logos, something he did not do in his *Homilies* either. In his *Commentary* he goes into even further detail by explaining that the church had already received a dowry in the form of ‘natural law’ (*lex naturalis*), the ‘sense of reason’ (*sensus rationalis*), and ‘free will’ (*libertas arbitrii*). All this had been supplemented by the teachings of the messengers of the Logos, i.e. the OT prophets. But all this is not sufficient for souls to be filled with divine perception and understanding, something only the kisses of the Logos himself can bestow, without the agency of human or angelic ministration. The ultimate union will not come through the church but through the *individual soul*. The church as an historical entity will ultimately van-

44 The expression ‘breasts of the Bridegroom’ at *Cant.* 1: 2f. stems from the LXX (μαστοί) translation of the Hebrew *dodm* which is also followed by the Vulgate (*ubera*).

45 Something which already for instance on the pagan side Heraclitus, *Problemata Homerika* 3. 2 demanded from the adequate readers of Homer! See also above p. 93f.

46 Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien* (supra n. 34) 21 etc. uses this term and I follow him here, although strictly speaking typological relationships should only be assumed between two historical figures, places, or events.

ish, but the union of the soul with the Divine will remain in eternity. Accordingly, the *Bridegroom's* breasts (which are better than wine) are to be understood as the direct and unmediated meeting with the Logos, whereas the wine represents knowledge that can be gained through intermediaries such as the prophets. The fragrance of the Logos is said to be better than all other fragrances, namely the teachings the church as a collective received through intermediaries. Thus, the fragrance of the Logos represents the unmediated access the perfected individual soul has to the divine mysteries.

This is strongly reminiscent of similar aspirations by pagan philosophies of the time of Origen, especially the Neo-Platonists, who – with the partial exception of Iamblichus – put a similar emphasis on individuality.⁴⁷ In his *Commentary* Origen takes over an idea from Plato's *Symposium* when he defines love as the power that can lead the soul to heaven (p. 63. 6ff. Baehrens).⁴⁸ He has a clearly apologetic aim when he emphasizes that Salomon wrote his biblical books long before the Greek philosophers and the Pythian Apollo who got their ideas from him (p. 75. 24; 76. 16; 77. 31 Baehrens). The *Song of Songs* denotes allegorically the level that leads the human soul beyond sensual perception to the vision of the Divine (p. 75. 21 Baehrens), by teaching the soul to reach 'community with God' (*consortium Dei*) "in the shape of bride and bridegroom, on the paths of love and desire" (*sub specie sponsae ac sponsi, caritatis et amoris viis*; p. 76. 12–16 Baehrens). Thus, a purified soul will be able to pierce through the erotic surface and see the divine truths hidden in all, even the most unlikely places. Tentatively, we might infer that this can then be applied even to reality at large – i. e. the divine can be seen in all things. Provided one has the right moral-hermeneutical attitude, metaphor can serve as cognitive therapy, but it must not become ridiculous.⁴⁹ Here we find an application which may in the first instance be considered apologetic, as it serves to free the text from statements considered improper for a sacred book. But beyond that there is the concrete practical, pedagogical and even therapeutic aim of changing one's values as well as the way one views reality and leads one's life, with the ultimate goal of gaining access to the divine mystical truths. An important ingredient that guarantees success with this is, again with an apologetic purpose, the emphasis of the necessity of faith, a faith that surpasses all earthly knowledge, including pagan philosophy.⁵⁰

As a conclusion one can thus highlight that depending on argumentative focus, in Origen the relationship between the Christian church and the individual believing soul changes: in his *Homilies* the *Song of Song* is interpreted as a loving relationship between Christ and the Church, which believing listeners can adopt as an event that

47 Karla Pollmann, *Mystagogy in St. Augustine: Rhetoric, Exegesis, and Liminality*, in: Paul van Geest (ed.), *Seeing through the eyes of faith. The Mystagogy of the Church Fathers*, Leuven 2016, 137–161, especially 145 and 157.

48 Cf. for this and the following also Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien* (supra n. 34) 23.

49 See under section 4 below p. 100–103 for this complex issue. Matter, *The Voice* (supra n. 34) 31–34 rightly emphasizes that these nuances have often escaped modern readers of Origen's allegorical method.

50 Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien* (supra n. 34) 25.

uplifts their own souls into a conversation with God.⁵¹ In his *Commentary*, Origen rearranges this scenario and puts the soul's mystical experience of the Logos and increasing closeness with God into the centre. It is this experience that allows such a soul then also to describe and interpret the relationship between the church and Christ.⁵² Whereas the earthly church as an institution will perish in the end, the human soul united with God will have eternal life. While Origen is able to give the church a more dominant role than the individual soul in his *Homilies* for *rhetorical-pedagogical* reasons, it is ultimately the soul that *theologically-philosophically* has the higher status, as expounded in his *Commentary*.⁵³

3.2. Porphyry: Allegory as Litmus Test

Porphyry (c. 232 – c. 305) writes in the *Life of Plotinus* 15. 75, which is the only one of his works that is securely datable to 301 or later,⁵⁴ that once at a feast in honour of Plato he recited a 'poem' (ποίημα) on Holy Marriage (Ἱερὸς Γάμος), which he had presumably written himself. This poem proclaimed many things shrouded in a mystical way and in enthusiasm, i.e. divine inspiration. One listener declared Porphyry to be out of his mind for doing this. But Plotinus defended his pupil Porphyry as someone who was at once a poet, a philosopher and a hierophant, i.e. a high priest and interpreter of mystical secrets. It seems reasonable to assume here an Orphic background where the linkage between religion, holy texts and mystical language was a familiar feature.⁵⁵ However, it is also tempting to speculate that perhaps Porphyry also had in mind the Jewish-Christian tradition of allegorizing the *Song of Songs* whose literal erotic 'surface' proved to be a particular exegetical challenge.⁵⁶ One of the first Christians to make a rigorous attempt at allegorizing the *Song of Songs* was Origen of Alexandria.⁵⁷ Porphyry fr. 39. 3 Harnack (= Eus. *h.e.* VI. 19. 5; = fr. 6F. Becker) claims that while he was still a youth he had met

51 Ohly, Hohelied-Studien (supra n. 34) 21.

52 Ohly, Hohelied-Studien (supra n. 34) 23.

53 This does not contradict Matter, *The Voice* (supra n. 34) 25–31 who rightly emphasizes the similarities and coherence of the interpretations of the *Song of Songs* offered in these two works by Origen.

54 Gillian Clark, *Porphyry and the City of God*, in: Sébastien Morlet (éd.), *Le traité de Porphyre contre les Chrétiens*, Paris 2011, 395–406, especially 404.

55 Cf. Männlein-Robert in this volume p. 177–206.

56 Matter, *The Voice* (supra n. 34) 28f.; Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien* (supra n. 34) 13 briefly mentions pre-Christian Jewish allegorical interpretations of the *Song of Songs* which interpret the bridegroom and the bride as symbolizing the relationship between God and his chosen people, and explains 15–17 that this Jewish tradition was taken over into a Christian context by Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235). In contrast to Origen, Hippolytus had no extensive impact on the later Christian exegesis of the *Song of Songs*. There also seems to have been little connection between medieval Christian and medieval Jewish interpretations of the *Song of Songs* (Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien* [supra n. 34] 13). Origen (Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien* [supra n. 34] 24) and the fifth-century Aponius (Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien* [supra n. 34] 51) seem to have known some of the Jewish exegetical tradition.

57 On whom see above, p. 95–99.

Origen, a learned man of great reputation already in his own lifetime. Even if some scholars dismiss this story as fictitious,⁵⁸ Origen was indeed important as he turned Christianity into serious intellectual business. So it may safely be assumed that Porphyry, one way or the other, was aware of Origen's output. It is then tempting to speculate that Porphyry's Ἱερὸς Γάμος was meant to emulate Christian allegorical interpretations of the *Song of Songs*, like those by Origen, and replace them with a properly authorized philosophical 'song' (ποίημα). That such battles went on between Christians and pagans at that time, and also referred to the apparent or perceived clash between 'lower' eroticism and the desire for eternal truth, can be seen in the *Symposium* by Methodius of Olympus (d.c. 311 or 312), a work that aims to be a Christianized version of Plato's *Symposium* extolling the virtue of virginity.⁵⁹ Methodius consciously evoked erotic inclinations and temptations in order to debunk them as futile and to contrast them with true virginity which was equated with perfect excellence and virtue.⁶⁰ His aim was cognitively to train his readers against sensual temptations in order to enable them to transcend their bodily desires.⁶¹

Porphyry admired Origen's erudition but accused him of schizophrenia:⁶²

And while his way of life was Christian and contrary to law, in his opinions concerning physics and the gods he played the Greek, and falsely introduced Greek teachings into foreign myths (fr. 39. 7 Harnack = 6F. Becker) (...)

- 58 See recently in great detail Marco Zambon, Porfirio e Origene, uno status quaestionis, in: Sébastien Morlet (éd.), *Le traité de Porphyre contre les Chrétiens*, Paris 2011, 107–164. He pleads that there were most likely two philosophers in Alexandria by the name of Origen in the early part of the third century, and that it was more likely that the pagan one was a pupil of Ammonios Sikkas who is also mentioned as a Platonist by Porphyry in his *Life of Plotinus* 14. 47 and 20. 108f. However, Zambon very sensibly argues that we must assume that Porphyry had read at least some of the works of the Christian Origen. Matthias Becker, Porphyrios, ›Contra Christianos‹. Neue Sammlung der Fragmente, Testimonien und Dubia mit Einleitung, Übersetzung und Anmerkungen, Berlin 2016 pleads for the historicity of Porphyry's encounter with Origen and emphasizes that his *Contra Christianos* had Origen as one of its main targets.
- 59 Ulrike Bruchmüller, Christliche Erotik in platonischem Gewand: Transformationstheoretische Überlegungen zur Umdeutung von Platons *Symposion* bei Methodios von Olympos, in: *Studia Patristica* 65/13, 2013, 435–444 passim, especially 436f., has to my mind convincingly argued that the aim of Methodius was not to demolish Plato, but on the contrary to use his authority, as well as that of Homer, to fight against contemporary heresies and the doctrines of the Stoics and the Epicureans.
- 60 Bruchmüller, Christliche Erotik (supra n. 59) 438–440, who also differentiates this strategy from a very similar one in Plato's *Symposium*, where for instance Alcibiades' physical erotic desires are played off against Socrates' truly philosophical attitude.
- 61 Bruchmüller, Christliche Erotik (supra n. 59) 443.
- 62 The following is fr. 6F. Becker whom I have consulted regarding the meaning of these statements: κατὰ μὲν τὸν βίον Χριστιανῶς ζῶν καὶ παρανόμως, κατὰ δὲ τὰς περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ δόξας ἐλληνίζων τε καὶ τὰ Ἑλλήνων τοῖς ὁθνεῖσι ὑποβαλλόμενος μύθοις ... ἐχρῆτο δὲ καὶ Χαϊρήμονος τοῦ Στωϊκοῦ Κορνούτου τε ταῖς βίβλοις, παρ' ὧν τὸν μεταλπητικὸν τῶν παρ' Ἑλλήσιν μυστηρίων γνῶς τρόπον ταῖς Ἰουδαϊκαῖς προσήψεν γραφαῖς.

And he also used the writings of the Stoic Chaereon, and Cornutus from whom he learned the indirect mode of expression as employed in the Greek mysteries, now applying it to the Jewish writings (fr. 39. 8 Harnack = 6F. Becker). Porphyry generally accuses the Christians of falsely declaring Moses' clear statements to be riddles and divine oracles full of hidden mysteries that merit allegorical interpretations (fr. 39. 4 Harnack = 6F. Becker).⁶³

All these categories are of course well-known from the ancient pagan tradition concerning the nature of metaphor or allegory. Figures of thought such as these are precisely meant to mingle 'alien spheres' (Aristotle's *ξενικόν*) in an innovative way. If Origen applied metaphysical interpretation to 'Jewish writings', so did Porphyry with ancient myths,⁶⁴ especially with that of the cave of Nymphs in *Odyssey* XIII. 102–112 to which he dedicated an entire treatise.⁶⁵ The assumption that a text that was literally ridiculous but contained hidden messages was familiar from Heraclitus and others. Porphyry mentions this himself in *Quaest. Hom.* Y 67–75 [7] (p. 240 MacPhail), and traces the beginnings of this allegorical method of interpretation back to Theagenes of Rhegium.⁶⁶ So is there a difference other than whether or not the reader is willing to play ball, that is, to participate or be complicit in this kind of understanding?

In his *Quaestiones Homericae* Porphyry dealt with Homer's two epics mainly from a philological and historical angle. He applied his formidable philological talents also to the Bible, following in the footsteps of Origen. Thus, the textual-critical approach to the Bible was strongly promoted – by a non-Christian. Porphyry relentlessly pursued the reading of the Scriptures in literary and historical terms, thereby forcing Christians to answer him on his own ground, especially when he pointed out factual errors and contradictions in the Bible with the aim of undermining its claims to authority and truthfulness altogether. Porphyry was strictly against an allegorical reading of Scripture, thereby forcing Christians to think about the Bible in non-allegorical terms.

In order to make this point in the strongest possible way, and in order to ridicule in particular Christocentric readings of the Old Testament, he offered a Christolog-

63 Cf. John Granger Cook, *The Interpretation of the Old Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism*, Tübingen 2004, 166f.

64 Robert M. Berchman, *Porphyry Against the Christians*, Leiden 2005, 136 n. 14. Porphyry also allegorised other passages from Homer's epics, see Cook, *The Interpretation* (supra n. 63) 165–168, and once even a passage from the biblical Book of *Daniel* (chapter 12), see Cook, *The Interpretation* (supra n. 63) 240–243.

65 See below, p. 103–106. In contrast to the later Proclus, Porphyry did not allegorize Plato, see Berchman, *Porphyry* (supra n. 64) 223.

66 Wolfgang Bernard, *Spätantike Dichtungstheorien. Untersuchungen zu Proklos, Herakleitos und Plutarch*, Stuttgart 1990, 65 and 76–78 speculates that Porphyry refers here to Stoic "substitutive" allegoresis which he disapproves of, in contrast to Platonic "dihairetical" allegoresis, which he finds acceptable. Bernard 281f. has to concede that these two different types of allegoresis, established by him, are often mixed and cannot be clearly aligned with different philosophical schools. Another problem is that Porphyry's statements do not explicitly support Bernard's hypothesis. Porphyry's accusation is not about the right method, but about the application of this method to the right texts in the right way; see also below p. 106f.

ical reading of the *Iliad*, as reported by Didymus the Blind (4th cent.), one of our earliest sources for Porphyry's critique of the Christian scriptures:⁶⁷

Porphyry, who intends to make charges against us that we proceed violently (βιαζόμεθα), when we fabricate spiritual explanations and allegories from the literal sense of a text (ἀναπλάττοντες ἀναγωγὰς καὶ ἀλληγορίας), interprets the lines of Homer, where Achilles and Hector are mentioned, allegorically as Christ and the Devil. And what we tend to say about the Devil, he said about Hector, and what we tend to say about Christ, he said about Achilles. He (scil. Porphyry) used the following words: "Before the victory of Achilles, Hector dominated over everything and one held him to be more powerful than all others." He did this for purposes of diabolical confusion. For in this way the method of anagogical interpretation (ἀναγωγή) is finished. However, even we (scil. Christians) often powerfully don the historical-literary sense of interpretation, not in order to show something historical-literal, but rather to lead (ἀνάγειν) the hearer to understanding (ἔννοιαν)⁶⁸

Porphyry tries to apply an in principle perfectly acceptable method in a way that seeks to undermine and ridicule Christian interpretative efforts. He knows that to elicit the highest allegorical sense out of a text is a means for gaining persuasion through textual and interpretative authority. Didymus seems to understand, although he does not state so explicitly, that this method is in both cases, i.e. Christianity and Greek pagan philosophy, the same, even if he cannot really reply to this aspect of Porphyry's challenge. Didymus then attempts to dismiss this seeming allegorical violence Christians commit to OT texts by emphasizing that Christians do not shy away from the historical-literary sense. However, according to Didymus, they employ it often not to make a literary-historical point or in order to explain the narrative,⁶⁹ but in order to edify the readers and lead them to understanding. So, again, text serves as cognitive therapy. In the early fourth century, when Christianity was intellectually, politically and culturally still insecure, Porphyry could shock with typological interpretations such as Hector as the Devil, and Achilles as Christ. This was later to vanish. The Empress Eudocia, around the middle of the fifth century, wrote Homeric centos in which she could use Homeric hexameters to stitch

67 Porphyry fr. 7F. Becker: Πορφύριος γοῦν θέλων ἐγκαλ[εῖν ἡμῖν ὅτι πρὸς τοῖς ῥή]τοῖς ἀναπλάττοντες ἀναγωγὰς καὶ ἀλλ[η]γορίας βιαζόμεθα, τὰ τοῦ Ὁμήρου, [ἐν]θα ὁ Ἀχιλλεύς καὶ Ἑκτωρ μνημονεύεται, ἡλληγόρησεν φήσας πρὸς τὸν Χ(ριστὸ)ν καὶ τὸν διάβολον· καὶ ἃ ἐλέγομεν ἡμεῖς περὶ τοῦ διαβόλου, αὐτὸς περὶ τοῦ Ἑκτορος, καὶ ἃ περὶ τοῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ, αὐτὸς περὶ Ἀχιλλέως· καὶ συνεχρᾶτο ταῖς τοιαύταις λέξεσιν ὅτι· 'πρὸ τῆς ἐπι[κ]ρατήσεως τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως ἐβρενθύετο κατὰ πάντων ὁ Ἑκτωρ καὶ πάντων δυνατώτερος ἐνομίζετο. ὑπὲρ τοῦ διαβαλεῖν δὲ τοῦτο ἐποίησεν.' ὥδε οὖν τὰ τῆς ἀναγωγῆς πέπαιται. πολλάκις δὲ καὶ ἡμεῖς βιαζόμεθα τὰ τῆς ἱστορίας, οὐχ ἵνα ἱστορίαν δεῖξωμεν, ἀλλ' ἵνα εἰς ἔννοιαν ἀνάγωμεν τὸν ἀκούοντα. See Berchman, Porphyry (supra n. 64) 142 n. 22.

68 I follow here, with modifications, Gebhard Binder, Eine Polemik des Porphyrios gegen die allegorische Auslegung des Alten Testaments durch die Christen, in: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 3, 1969, 81–95, 92 and 94, and Becker fr. 7F., as Berchman fr. 26, p. 142f. is unsatisfactory.

69 And this is mainly what Porphyry's criticism of the Bible concentrates on!

together stories about the life of Christ based on the NT.⁷⁰ In a similar vein, in the 12th century, the Christian ‘tragedy’ of Christ’s passion could be told in a cento predominantly consisting of verses from Euripides.⁷¹

Of course it is no surprise that Porphyry in his own interpretations of Hector and Achilles refrains, as far as we can see from the extant material, from any symbolical, allegorical or typological interpretation of these two heroes. He focusses more on the heroic ethos and its flaws as they become apparent in the *Iliad*. In *Quaest. Hom. ad Il.* X 71 (p. 252 MacPhail) Porphyry highlights the fact that Hector in the final duel does not want to challenge Achilles out of good motifs, like doing something on behalf of one’s homeland and for the benefits of one’s relatives, but out of ‘rashness’ (προπετεία). In *Quaest. Hom. ad Il.* Ω 15–6 (p. 258–262 MacPhail) he emphasizes the uncustomary behaviour of Achilles when violating Hector’s corpse but also emphasizes that Hector during his life had similarly unethical thoughts, and, relatively speaking, was treated not as badly by Achilles as Hector himself had intended to violate Patroclus’ corpse. Porphyry also offers a more conciliatory solution to this offensive behaviour by referring to Aristotle who claimed that dragging corpses was a ‘custom’ (ἔθος) in those days (*Quaest. Hom. ad Il.* Ω 15–6, [11], p. 260 MacPhail).

Where are the limits of absurdity? In his essay *On the Cave of the Nymphs*,⁷² Porphyry acknowledges in ch. 2 that because the ‘literal understanding’ (καθ’ ἱστορίαν) of this passage from book XIII of the *Odyssey* is ‘absurd’ (ἀπιθανός), Homer must be assumed ‘to speak here in riddles’ (Porph. *Antr.* 1, p. 55. 1 N. αἰνίττεται [= p. 36. 3 Simonini]). According to the Neopythagorean philosopher Cronius (second century AD) “it is evident (ἐκδηλον), not only to the wise but also to the vulgar, that the poet, under the veil of allegory (ἀλληγορεῖν), conceals some mysterious signification; thus *compelling* (ἀναγκάζοντα) others to explore” (Porph. *Antr.* 3) the deeper meanings of this text. Porphyry develops in this context a differentiated attitude towards the notions of fiction and symbolic or metaphorical/allegorical meaning of a text, viz. as requiring an ‘interpretation’ (Porph. *Antr.* 36, p. 81. 10 N. ἐρμηνεία [= p. 84. 20 Simonini]). He explains that the description of this cave cannot really be understood as referring in all details to a historically

70 Cf. Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Gospel ‘According to Homer and Virgil’*. Cento and Canon, Leiden 2011, 181–228 for an analysis of Eudocia’s centonic technique. For instance, Sandnes, *The Gospel* 210–214 shows how Eudocia modelled Jesus’ crucifixion on Hector’s death in *Iliad* XXII.

71 See Karla Pollmann, *Jesus Christus und Bacchus. Überlegungen zu dem griechischen Cento Christus patiens*, in: *Jahrbuch für österreichische Byzantinistik* 47, 1997, 87–106, especially 92f. (reprinted in an updated version in ead., *The Baptized Muse*, Oxford 2017).

72 The dating of this little treatise is not clear, e.g. Karin Alt, *Homers Nymphengrotte in der Deutung des Porphyrios*, in: *Hermes* 126, 1998, 466–487, 487 dates it into the early pre-Plotinian phase of Porphyry’s life because she considers the work to be full of unresolved tensions and contradictions; Anna Penati Bernardini, *Il motivo dell’antro nell’esegesi porfiriana di Od. XIII*, 102–112, in: *Aevum* 62, 1988, 116–123, 119–121 dates it into the final phase of Porphyry’s life because she sees close analogies with *Ad Marcellam*. Both lines of reasoning are of only very limited validity.

existing cave (Porph. *Antr.* 2, p. 55. 14f. N. [= p. 36. 16f. Simonini]). But, he continues, it is equally inappropriate to declare this description to be mere fiction (ib. p. 55. 17f. N. [= p. 36. 20f. Simonini]), since both the island of Ithaca where this cave is supposed to have been, as well as the existence of caves on this island can be proven. Thus, one cannot assume the entire passage to be Homeric invention throughout (Porph. *Antr.* 4, p. 58. 11f. N. [= p. 42. 5 Simonini]). However, it is not the poet's aim to present a "fictitious story" (πλάσμα) for entertainment or "an exposition of a topical history" (ἱστορίας τοπικῆς περιήγησιν), but "to offer deep and hidden meanings" (ἀλληγορεῖν; ib., p. 57. 17–20 N. [= p. 40. 11–15 Simonini]). Nevertheless, Porphyry insists that he, as an interpreter, has two possibilities: either Homer describes a real cave which is dedicated to the gods, and then one has to find out the intention of those who made such a dedication, or it is an invented story whose hidden meaning has to be decoded (Porph. *Antr.* 21, p. 70. 22–24 N. [= p. 64. 16–19 Simonini]). In either case it is crucial to understand that Homer does not make up the symbolic meaning of this real or invented cave *de novo*, but incorporates ancient lore (Porph. *Antr.* 4, p. 58. 16–18 N. [= p. 42. 9–12 Simonini]). It is well worth the labour of the interpreter to discover this hidden wisdom in Homer's allegorical passage (ib., p. 58. 22f. N. [= p. 42. 15–17 Simonini]). In the end it does not matter how much historical reality Homer's description contains as the important level of meaning is fully contained in its symbolic stratum.⁷³

Among other things, he deduces that this cave is a symbol of the world in its sensible dimension and of the powers that rule the world, viz. of the cosmic elements, forces of nature and spiritual substance (Porph. *Antr.* 5–9, p. 59–62 N. [= p. 42–50 Simonini]). Thus, Porphyry accepts that Homer's text has various symbolic layers that are connected by the overarching idea of the divine.⁷⁴ Following from this, the cave nymphs, the so-called Naiads, symbolize the souls that descend into bodies.⁷⁵ He strengthens this claim by referring to ancient lore and religious folklore where caves always had a sacred meaning and by referring to textual authorities like Empedocles, Plato and the *Hymn to Apollo*.⁷⁶ On top of this cave grows an olive tree which requires the following explanation (Porph. *Antr.* 32):⁷⁷

73 Cf. very helpful the observations in Peter Crome, *Symbol und Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache*. Jamblichos, Plotin, Porphyrios, Proklos, München 1970, 144–146, and Alt, *Homers Nymphengrotte* (supra n. 72) 469. I disagree with Penati Bernardini, *Il motivo* (supra n. 72) 116–119 who sees in Porphyry's emphasis on the at least partial historical reality of the cave an anti-Christian polemic, that only texts with a historical core are justifiably allegorized, something that is therefore acceptable for this passage but not for the Bible.

74 See Crome, *Symbol* (supra n. 73) 157; Alt, *Homers Nymphengrotte* (supra n. 72) 469–471; Penati Bernardini, *Il motivo* (supra n. 71) 122f.

75 See Crome, *Symbol* (supra n. 73) 148–150; Alt, *Homers Nymphengrotte* (supra n. 72) 471f.

76 See Crome, *Symbol* (supra n. 73) 146–148; Alt, *Homers Nymphengrotte* (supra n. 72) 467, who emphasizes there and 483, 487 the contradictions and tensions in *De antro nymphaeum*, which she explains with Porphyry's uncritical use of sources.

77 Porph. *Antr.* 32, p. 78. 10–21 Nauck (= p. 78. 25–80, 9 Simonini): ἐπεὶ γὰρ ὁ κόσμος οὐκ εἰκῇ οὐδ' ὥς ἔτυχε γέγονεν, ἀλλ' ἔστι φρονήσεως θεοῦ καὶ νοεράς φύσεως ἀποτέλεσμα, παραπεφύτευται τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ κόσμου τῷ ἄνθρωπῳ σύμβολον φρονήσεως θεοῦ ἢ ἐλαία.

For since the world was not produced rashly and casually, but is the work of divine wisdom and an intellectual nature; hence an olive tree, the symbol (σύμβολον) of this wisdom, flourishes near the present cavern, which is an image (εἰκὼν) of the world. For the olive tree is the plant of Athena, and Athena is wisdom. But this Goddess being produced from the head of the God, the theologian (θεολόγος)⁷⁸ has discovered an appropriate place for the olive tree by consecrating it at the summit of the port; signifying (σημαίνων) by this that the universe is not the effect of a casual event and the work of irrational fortune, but that it is the offspring of an intellectual nature and divine wisdom, which is separated indeed from it (by a difference of essence), but yet is near to it, through being established on the summit of the whole port (i.e., from the dignity and excellence of its nature governing the whole with consummate wisdom).

Porphyry accords to the olive tree the function of a meta-sign symbolizing the divine power that is the foundation of the cave and its inhabitants.⁷⁹ Throughout this treatise, Porphyry works very hard to make his quite fanciful mystagogical interpretations credible, by offering intriguing parallels both from Homer and other learned, also exotic sources, including some from Persia. Nevertheless, he has to caution his readers at the end of his little treatise, in *Porph. Antr.* 36:⁸⁰

It must not, however, be thought that interpretations of this kind are *forced* (ἐξηγήσεις βεβιασμένας), and nothing more than the conjectures of ingenious people (εὐρεσιλογούντων πιθανότηας); but when we consider the great wisdom of antiquity and how much Homer excelled in intellectual prudence, and in an accurate knowledge of every virtue, it must not be denied that he has obscurely indicated the images of things of a more divine nature in the fiction (πλάσμα) of a fable (μῦθος). For it would not have been possible for him successfully to devise (πλάσσειν) a complete hypothesis (ὑπόθεσις) unless the fiction (πλάσμα) had been remodelled from certain established truths (ἀπό τινων ἀληθῶν).

Thus, Porphyry explains the necessity and function of symbolic representation as the instantiation of the divine.⁸¹ Symbolic representation has the ability to make the divine force that is the foundational condition of the material world visible. The cave ceases to be a factual-historical location but acquires a higher and more fun-

Ἀθηνᾶς μὲν γὰρ τὸ φυτόν, φρόνησις δὲ ἡ Ἀθηνᾶ. κρατογενοῦς δ' οὕσης τῆς θεοῦ, οἰκείον τόπον ὁ θεολόγος ἐξεῦρεν ἐπὶ κρατὸς τοῦ λιμένος αὐτὴν καθιερώσας, σημαίνων δι' αὐτῆς ὡς οὐκ ἐξ αὐτοματισμοῦ τὸ ὅλον τοῦτο καὶ τύχης ἀλόγου ἔργον γέγονεν, ἀλλ' ὅτι φύσεως νοεῶς καὶ σοφίας ἀποτέλεσμα, χωριστῆς μὲν οὕσης ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, πλησίον δὲ κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τοῦ σύμπαντος λιμένος ἰδρυμένης.

78 It is tempting to speculate that Augustine never calls himself a theologian because this term carries strong pagan intellectual associations.

79 See Crome, *Symbol* (supra n. 73) 153; Alt, *Homers Nymphengrotte* (supra n. 72) 483–485.

80 *Porph. Antr.* 36, p. 81. 1–8 Nauck (= p. 84. 10–17 Simonini): οὐ δεῖ δὲ τὰς τοιαύτας ἐξηγήσεις βεβιασμένας ἡγείσθαι καὶ εὐρεσιλογούντων πιθανότητας, λογιζόμενον δὲ τὴν παλαιὰν σοφίαν καὶ τὴν Ὀμήρου ὅση τις φρόνησις γέγονε καὶ πάσης ἀρετῆς ἀκρίβειαν μὴ ἀπογινώσκειν ὡς ἐν μυθάρῳ πλάσματι εἰκόνας τῶν θειοτέρων ἡνίσσεται. οὐ γὰρ ἐντὴν ἐπιτυχῶς πλάσσειν ὅλην ὑπόθεσιν μὴ ἀπὸ τινων ἀληθῶν μεταποιούντα τὸ πλάσμα. See also Cook, *The Interpretation* (supra n. 63) 168.

81 See Crome, *Symbol* (supra n. 73) 154–155.

damental reality, the reality of the divine.⁸² Now, one could argue that sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and Porphyry's technique and claims are the same as those of, for instance, Origen. But Porphyry would not have agreed.⁸³ One could call this a "cultural impasse":⁸⁴ "In his attack Porphyry denied the Christian teachers their favourite refuge: allegory. Porphyry dealt with the plain sense of words. Having mastered allegorical interpretation as a student of Longinus, he knew the tricks of the trade. Whether speaking of the prophecies of the *Book of Daniel* or the apocalyptic teaching of the church, he refused to excuse contradiction as "mystery" or misstatement of fact as paradox. The gospel writers were not Homer (...), they were hardly worthy of the reverence with which Romans in increasing numbers treated them."⁸⁵

However, Porphyry is consistent in claiming that the narratives of Moses are clear as they stand and do not merit an allegorical interpretation. This would mean imposing one's own heterogeneous ideas on the Old Testament texts. This is an accusation Porphyry even launches against some allegorical interpreters of Homer, as he states in his *On the Styx*:⁸⁶

The poet's thought is not, as one might think, easily grasped, for all the ancients expressed matters concerning the gods and daimones through enigmas. But Homer went to even greater length to keep these things hidden (ἀπέκρυψε) and refrained from speaking of them directly (προηγουμένως) but rather used those things he did say to reveal other things beyond their obvious meaning. Of those who have undertaken to develop and expound those things he expressed through secondary meanings (ὑπονοίας), the Pythagorean Cronius seems to have accomplished the task most ably, but on the whole he fits extraneous material (ἄλλα τε ἐφαρμόζει) to the

- 82 See Crome, *Symbol* (supra n. 73) 155–158, who 158 highlights a certain tension between Porphyry's theoretical scepticism towards the capability of a symbol to represent the divine in its entirety and his practical use of the symbol which is then indeed seen as a concrete realisation of divine order.
- 83 See Cook, *The Interpretation* (supra n. 63) 165f. Nor would have another important figure, Augustine of Hippo, to which I hope to return on another occasion for this issue.
- 84 Cook, *The Interpretation* (supra n. 63) 164. See also for an analogous case in a controversy between the Emperor Julian and Cyril of Alexandria Christoph Riedweg, *Exegese als Kampfmittel in der Auseinandersetzung zwischen Heiden und Christen: Zum "Sündenbock" von Lev 16 bei Julian und Kyrill von Alexandrien*, in: *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 16, 2013, especially 444–447, and 473–476 where he also concludes (476) that one does not allow one's pagan or heretical opponent to use the same exegetical techniques as one does oneself.
- 85 R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Porphyry's Against the Christians. The Literary Remains Edited and translated with an Introduction and Epilogue*, Amherst, NY 1994, 17f.
- 86 Porphyry fr. 372F. Smith: ἔστι δὲ ἡ τοῦ ποιητοῦ δόξα οὐχ ὥς ἂν τις νομίσειεν εὐληπτος. πάντες μὲν γὰρ οἱ παλαιοὶ τὰ περὶ τῶν θεῶν καὶ δαιμόνων δι' αἰνιγμάτων ἐσήμαναν, Ὅμηρος δὲ καὶ μᾶλλον τὰ περὶ τούτων ἀπέκρυψε τῷ μὴ προηγουμένως περὶ αὐτῶν διαλέγεσθαι, καταχρῆσθαι δὲ τοῖς λεγομένοις εἰς παράστασιν ἄλλων. τῶν οὖν ἀναπτύσειν ἐπιχειρησάντων τὰ δι' ὑπονοίας παρ' αὐτῷ λεγόμενα ἱκανώτατα δοκῶν ὁ Πυθαγόρειος Κρόνιος τοῦτ' ἀπεργάσασθαι, ὅμως ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις ἄλλα τε ἐφαρμόζει ταῖς τεθείσαις ὑποθέσεσι, τὰ Ὅμηρου μὴ δυνάμενος, οὗ τε τοῖς παρὰ τοῦ ποιητοῦ τὰς δόξας, τοῖς δὲ παρ' ἐαυτοῦ προσάγειν τὸν ποιητὴν πεφίλοτιμῃται. The translation above is quoted from Cook, *The Interpretation* (supra n. 63) 165, slightly modified.

texts in question since he is unable to apply Homer's own, and he has not endeavoured to accommodate his ideas (δόξας) to the poet's words but rather to accommodate the poet to his own ideas.⁸⁷

Three things are here particularly noteworthy: first, Porphyry is clearly aware of the potential arbitrariness of allegorical interpretation and tries to identify clear criteria to avoid this; second, he implicitly claims to accommodate himself to the poet's own ideas, and thus claims interpretative superiority over others who do the opposite; third, his criticism of misapplied allegoresis is not exclusively directed against Christians of his time and their treatment of the Bible, but also against pagan fellow-philosophers and their treatment of Homer.⁸⁸ But when it came to battling the Christians and their claims a lot was at stake, which I only sketch briefly in fig. 2.

Fig. 2: Conflicting orders⁸⁹

"Christians" ⁹⁰	Porphyry
fall caused by human will	ontological fall of the human soul
σῶμα ("body") as temple of God	νοῦς ("mind") as temple of God
all knowledge is fragmentary and temporary in this world; perfect vision of God and truth only in the life to come	step-by-step perfection of knowledge and increasing unification with God already possible in this life
Bible as frame of reference, also as allegory	Plato and other ancient wisdom texts as frame of reference; Homer as allegory ⁹¹
faith, hope, love (ἀγάπη)	faith, hope, love (ἐρως), truth
Christ as ultimate agent of human salvation	humans as agents of their own salvation

87 Augustine can warn Christians of the same danger when interpreting the Bible, see e.g. Aug. *serm.* 131. 10.

88 Cf. Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, Berkeley 1989, 83–231 and Robert Lamberton, *The Neoplatonists and the Spiritualization of Homer*, in: id. (ed.), *Homer's Ancient Readers. The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic's Earliest Exegetes*, Princeton 1992, 115–133 for an overview of various Neoplatonic approaches to Homer. Similarly, there were also disputes and controversies among Neoplatonists on how to interpret Plato and how to use him for their own philosophy, cf. the contribution by Smith in this volume p. 31–40.

89 Karin Alt, *Glaube, Wahrheit, Liebe, Hoffnung bei Porphyrios*, in: Dietmar Wyrwa (Hrsg.), *Die Weltlichkeit des Glaubens in der Alten Kirche*, Berlin 1997, 25–43, 36–38 emphasizes that in Porph. *Marc.* 26 we do not find a divine person as *soter*, but the institution of the divine *nous*. The idea of a temple of God inside human beings can first be found in Eur. *Hel.* 1002f. ἐν τῇ φύσει (412 BC); Paul calls this place σῶμα (especially *1 Cor.* 6:19) or locates it in human beings in general (*2 Cor.* 6:16; *1 Cor.* 3:16). Most remarkably, Porph. *Marc.* 12 and 29 emphasizes the divine as the source of all good things, but that it is innocent of all evil that befalls humans – this they choose all themselves, cf. Alt, *Glaube* 34f., and Irmgard Männlein-Robert, *Tugend, Flucht und Ekstase: Zur ὁμοίωσις θεῷ in Kaiserzeit und Spätantike*, in: Christian Pietsch (Hrsg.), *Ethik des antiken Platonismus*, Stuttgart 2013, 99–111, 109f. on Plotinus'

4. CONCLUSIONS

The analytical categories of threat and order have proven to be extraordinarily fertile for an analysis of metaphorical and allegorical language in the context of the late antique battle between pagans and Christians for cultural and religious hegemony. Porphyry's interests are likely as much religious and philosophical as they are political, as in his time Christianity became increasingly established in society, and more and more upper-class members converted to it. Such highly educated Christians had access to senatorial members of society and even to the imperial family.⁹² Porphyry is more interested in undermining the Christian proof texts and their authors, including the apostles, rather than Jesus himself, to whom he accords piety and elevation to immortality.⁹³ Moreover, he concentrates less on high philosophical criticism than on exegetical issues in order to dismiss biblical passages that seemed to him contradictory, and, even more importantly, on the exegetical efforts of the Christians, predominantly their allegorical interpretations, especially of the Old Testament. Porphyry drew careful distinctions "between the teachings and character of Jesus and those of his disciples".⁹⁴ Christianity's claim to the historicity of its 'myth', in combination with the validity of its universality and exclusiveness regarding human salvation posed a threat to the various ancient mystery cults and religions that were also making claims to universality, but which did not demand exclusive allegiance.

union with God already in his lifetime. Hoffmann, Porphyry (supra n. 85), offering 162–173 a good comparison between Porphyry's 'theology' and Christianity, rightly emphasizes 162 that Porphyry would have taken issue with the under-emphasis of human wisdom and excellence in Christian teaching which seemed instead to require everything of God and nothing of humans. Alt, Glaube 38–43 discusses the similarities and differences between the Pauline triad and Porphyry's addition of truth (ἀλήθεια). She concludes (ib. 43) convincingly that presumably he had both the Chaldean tradition and Paul's text in mind when he combined four abstract virtues, and that his aim in this was both to add the element of cognition to Paul, and at the same time to distance himself from the theurgist tendencies of the Chaldean tradition.

- 90 We are aware that Christians in Late Antiquity, as today, are not one homogenous group with one uniform body of thought accepted by all of them. Thus, the above has to be seen as a simplification meant to bring out fundamental differences. The possibility that some Christian groups would show even greater, or indeed fewer differences in comparison with Porphyry or other Neo-platonic models, is not investigated here.
- 91 In later Platonists, Plato's texts could also be interpreted allegorically, as e.g. in Proclus' commentary on Plato's *Politeia*.
- 92 Cf. the contribution by Udo Hartmann in this volume p. 207–235.
- 93 Jeffrey W. Hargis, *Against the Christians. The rise of early anti-Christian polemic*, New York 1999, 72, 83–88, who elucidates convincingly how this was intended by Porphyry as a move to integrate Christianity to a limited way into his own religious understanding and philosophical system, without, however, acknowledging Christ as a god (Hargis, *Against the Christians* 89 "limited assimilation"). Hoffmann, Porphyry (supra n. 85) 170f. is sceptical of the authenticity and, to my mind unconvincingly, regards them as an early Christian interpolation, that happened before Eusebius and Augustine who report this.
- 94 Hargis, *Against the Christians* (supra n. 93) 72.

Porphry expected concrete consequences for one's practical way of life as a tangible result of one's philosophical convictions, as can for instance be clearly seen in his *Ad Marcellam* 33–35,⁹⁵ written around 300.⁹⁶ This again brought him into conflict with the analogous Christian claim.⁹⁷ Porphry believed in the possibility of harmonizing Platonic philosophy with the best of popular philosophical traditions, including Christianity. He also in principle believed in the ultimate unity of otherwise diverse religious beliefs and practices and therefore postulated the possibility of “a system of religious cult or philosophical wisdom that transcended the boundaries of nationality and localized cultic practice”.⁹⁸ His *philosophical* belief in a true universalism was flanked by the Emperor Aurelian's *political* effort to unify religious beliefs throughout the Roman World, by establishing the cult of Sol Invictus.⁹⁹ It is tragic for both Porphry and Aurelian that their universalising efforts to absorb Christianity into a wider syncretistic context, as the Roman Empire had managed so successfully to achieve with other religions for centuries, did not, in the case of Christianity, work. Regarding the monopolization of how to interpret texts and what behavioural codes to derive therefrom, Christianity eventually showed greater flexibility and determination in exploiting the power of metaphor and allegory to entice reader participation and to generate group cohesion. This even led to the absorption of pagan classical thought into an overarching Christian worldview, something that was never undertaken to such an extent by pagan intellectuals regarding Christianity. Among other things, it was this dynamic exploitation of metaphor and allegory as global figures of thought that aided Christianity in establishing itself ultimately as *the* universal religion.

95 Cf. Walter Pötscher, *Porphyrios: Pros Markellan*, Leiden 1969, 137–139; Kathleen O'Brien Wicker, *Porphyry the Philosopher: To Marcella*, Atlanta 1987, 19–21; Alt, Glaube (supra n. 89) 25–26, 37.

96 Pötscher, *Porphyrios* (supra n. 95) 2–3.

97 Alt, Glaube (supra n. 89) 31, 36.

98 Hargis, *Against the Christians* (supra n. 93) 77.

99 Hargis, *Against the Christians* (supra n. 93) 82f.

APPENDIX: FIG. 1

Petrarch's Vergil, Title page, ca. 1336 by Simone Martini, Manuscript S.P. Arm, 10, folio 1v, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

